

# HEALTH

## West Nile Virus

West Nile encephalitis is an infection of the brain caused by the West Nile virus, a flavivirus commonly found in Africa, West Asia and the Middle East. It is closely related to St. Louis encephalitis virus found in the United States. It is not known how long it has been in the U.S., but CDC scientists believe the virus has probably been in the eastern U.S. since the early summer of 1999 or longer.

### Questions and Answers

#### **What is the basic transmission cycle?**

Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds, which may circulate the virus in their blood for a few days. After an incubation period of 10 days to two weeks, infected mosquitoes can then transmit the West Nile virus to humans and animals while biting to take blood. People become infected by the bite of a mosquito (primarily one of the *Culex* species) that is infected with West Nile virus. West Nile encephalitis is not transmitted from person to person.

#### **What are the symptoms of West Nile encephalitis?**

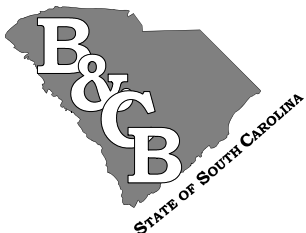
Most infections are mild and symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph glands. Severe infection may include convulsions, paralysis, coma and rarely death. The case-fatality rates range from 3 percent to 15 percent and are highest in the elderly.

#### **How is West Nile encephalitis treated?**

There is no specific therapy. In most cases hospitalization occurs. There is not a vaccine against West Nile encephalitis.

#### **How can I reduce my risk of becoming infected with West Nile virus?**

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants whenever you are outdoors.
- Apply insect repellent sparingly to exposed skin. An effective repellent will contain 35 percent DEET (N, N-diethyle-meta-toluamide). Repellents may irritate the eyes and mouth, so avoid applying repellent to the hands of children.



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